Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health 2026–2027



Cover Image
Take 5.
Donegal County Council.
Photo: Alan McLaughlin.

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Introduction

Our Vision

People of all ages living in Ireland experience better health and wellbeing through access to creative and cultural engagement, which also enriches our creative and artistic landscape.

Participation in creative and cultural activity is a recognised positive health behaviour and an enabler of health, wellbeing and social connection across the life course. Engagement in activities such as music, singing, dance, visual arts, craft, writing, drama, storytelling and wider cultural participation can enhance emotional wellbeing, build confidence, strengthen social connection, improve quality of life and foster a greater sense of belonging within communities.

The **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036** sets out a ten-year vision to make creative arts and health more accessible, better coordinated and more sustainable in Ireland. This action plan outlines the priority actions for 2026–2027 that will support implementation of the strategy. This action plan seeks to:

- increase participation in creative and cultural activity across the life course
- improve health and wellbeing outcomes through creative engagement
- reduce inequalities in access to creative participation
- strengthen partnerships across health, culture, local government and community sectors
- embed creative arts and health within mainstream health and wellbeing systems
- build a sustainable evidence base to support long-term investment and policy development

Strategic Objectives

The plan addresses these actions under the following five strategic objectives:



Delivery

Develop sustainable and scalable creative arts and health programmes that improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Reduce inequalities in access to creative participation and prioritise groups that experience barriers to participation.



Policy

Embed creative arts and health within national health, wellbeing, culture and community policy.



Evidence

Build a robust evidence base demonstrating impact, value for money and contribution to public health objectives.



Professional Development

Strengthen creative arts and health expertise and support continuous professional development.



Communications

Increase awareness, understanding and support for creative arts and health.

This action plan builds on the achievements to date by the National Creative Arts and Health Working Group established in 2020 and the delivery of actions as part of the Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health 2025, as well as decades of previous practice in this sector.

Governance

The successful implementation of the **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036** and this action plan will be supported by a robust governance structure that promotes collaboration, accountability and continuous stakeholder engagement across the health, arts, culture, community and research sectors.

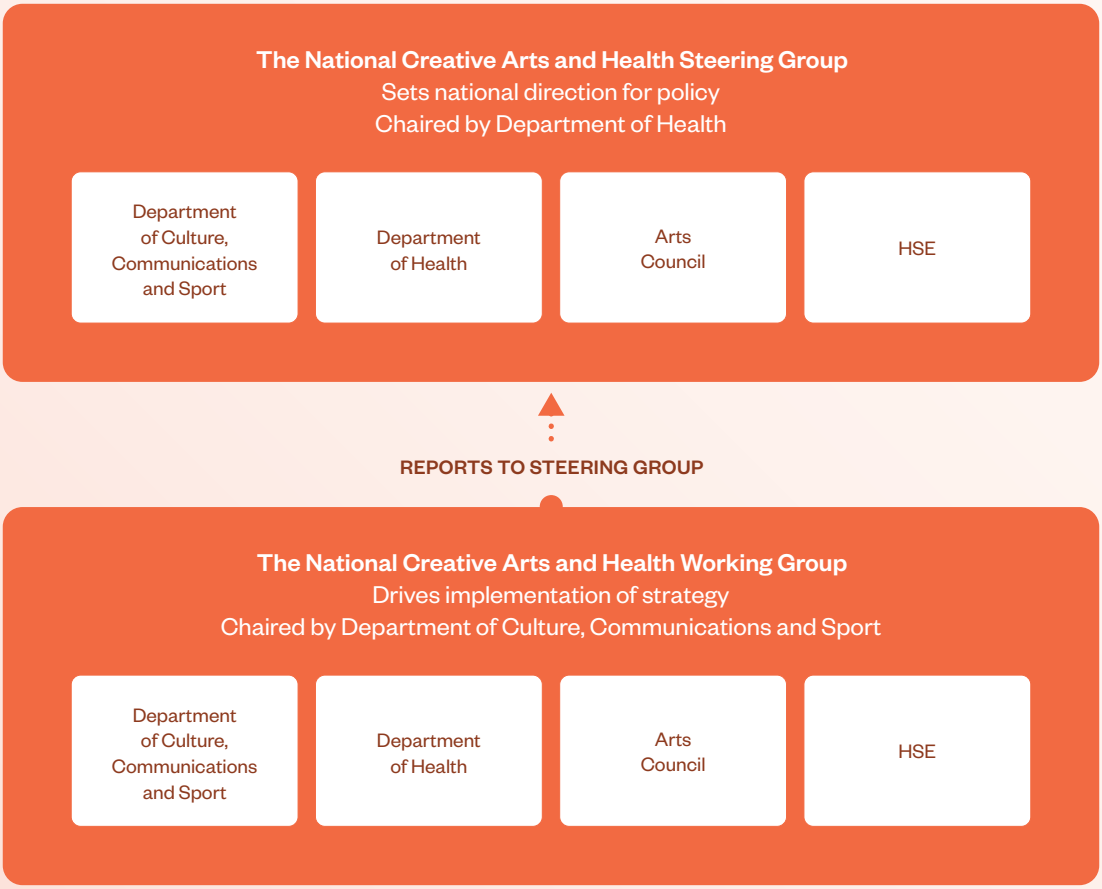
The National Creative Arts and Health Working Group will lead the implementation of the strategy and its associated action plans. The working group will oversee the delivery of this first action plan, coordinating actions across partner organisations, monitoring progress against agreed objectives, identifying emerging opportunities and challenges and supporting the delivery of measurable outcomes.

The National Creative Arts and Health Working Group will report to the National Creative Arts and Health Steering Group, chaired by the Department of Health and comprising senior representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, the HSE and the Arts Council. The steering group will provide strategic oversight, guide policy alignment, support cross-sectoral collaboration, and ensure that implementation remains aligned with national health, and culture priorities.



Fuaim na Cuimhne / Sound of Memory.
Kilkenny County Council.
Photo: Ellen McCahill.

Governance Structure



Strategic Objective 1

Delivery

Develop sustainable and scalable creative arts and health programmes that improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Reduce inequalities in access to creative participation and prioritise groups that experience barriers to participation.

The focus of this objective is to move beyond pilot projects and establish sustainable delivery models that support participation, wellbeing and social connection. Building on existing programmes including the Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community, Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity and Live Music Performances in Residential Healthcare Settings schemes, delivery will be expanded through partnerships across government departments, the HSE, local authorities and the arts community.

List of Abbreviations

DCCS	Department of Culture, Communications and Sport
DoH	Department of Health
HSE	Health Service Executive



Mending HeArts.
Galway City and County Councils.
Photo: Tom Flannagan.

No	Action	Lead	Timeline
1.1	Strengthen cross-sector collaboration between Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Creative Ireland), the Department of Health, the HSE, Healthy Ireland and local authorities to advance the **Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community** scheme, developing a sustainable delivery model for creative health and wellbeing that supports prevention, health equity and community wellbeing.	DCCS, DoH, local authorities, HSE	Q4 2026–Q4 2028
1.2	Develop a funding decision-making framework supported by a clear assessment process to enable transparent, equitable allocation of resources across funding schemes.	Working group	Q3 2026–Q1 2027
1.3	Embed creative arts and cultural participation within social prescribing pathways ensuring equitable access to creative opportunities in local communities.	Arts Council, HSE	Q3 2026–Q4 2028
1.4	Establish and resource a national **Creative Mental Health and Wellbeing** scheme to position arts and creative participation as a core component of mental health promotion expanding access to inclusive creative opportunities that strengthen wellbeing, social connection and community cohesion with a particular focus on populations at greater risk of social isolation and poor mental health outcomes.	DoH, DCCS	Q4 2026–Q3 2027
1.5	Expand the **Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity** scheme and establish dedicated annual funding to support equitable access to creative arts initiatives which promote wellbeing, inclusion, participation and cultural identity.	Arts Council, HSE	Q2-Q4 2028
1.6	Scope the delivery of creative arts and health initiatives for people with disabilities.	DoH, DCCS, HSE	Q1 2027–Q4 2028
1.7	Explore opportunities to integrate arts and culture into HSE climate and health priorities, including the identification of effective delivery mechanisms.	DoH, HSE	Q1 2027–Q4 2027
1.8	Strengthen the integration of arts and creativity as a core component of person-centred care in residential healthcare settings through the national rollout and implementation of the **Arts in Older Persons Services: Guidance Documents**.	HSE	Q3 2026–Q1 2027
1.9	Expand and embed the **Live Music Performances in Residential Healthcare Settings** scheme as a sustainable national creative health initiative increasing access to regular live music experiences, strengthening connections between care settings, artists and local communities.	DCCS, HSE, DoH	Ongoing
1.10	Support the HSE on the implementation of the **Per Cent for Art** scheme in appropriate HSE Capital Infrastructure projects through the provision of guidance, resources, local knowledge, and connections to artists, artworks and relevant expertise as required.	HSE, Arts Council	Ongoing
1.11	Establish and support HSE Creative Arts and Health Coordinators Network to strengthen collaboration and knowledge exchange across the arts and health services.	HSE	Q3 2026–Q4 2027
1.12	Explore the feasibility and sustainability of a creative arts and health leadership role that aligns with, and supports, HSE Health Regions.	HSE	Q4 2027

Strategic Objective 2



Policy

Embed creative arts and health within national health, wellbeing, culture and community policy.

The focus of this objective is to strengthen the policy foundations required to support the long-term development and sustainability of creative arts and health in Ireland. This objective will support the integration of creative arts and health within national and local health, wellbeing, culture and community policies.

No.	Action	Lead	Timeline
2.1	Embed creative arts and health across national health, wellbeing and community related policies ensuring its contribution to prevention, social inclusion and health equity is reflected in key frameworks including the **Healthy Ireland Framework 2013–2025, Pathways to Wellbeing: National Mental Health Promotion Plan 2024-30**, the **HSE Public Health Strategy 2025–2030**.	Working group	Ongoing
2.2	Strengthen national leadership and advocacy for creative arts and health through sustained cross-governmental collaboration with relevant departments, agencies and representative bodies.	Working group	Q3 2026–Q3 2028
2.3	Develop business cases for piloting of new initiatives and / or scaling of relevant creative arts and health initiatives for Estimates 2028, Ireland's public spending estimated fiscal package for 2028.	Working group	Q4 2026–Q2 2027

Strategic Objective 3

Evidence

Build a robust evidence base demonstrating impact, value for money and contribution to public health objectives.

The focus of this objective is to strengthen the evidence foundation required to support the long-term development and sustainability of creative arts and health in Ireland. This objective will advance research, evaluation and data collection to improve understanding of the contribution of creative arts and health initiatives.



Fuaim na Cuimhne / Sound of Memory.
Kilkenny County Council.
Photo: Freddie Greenall.

No.	Action	Lead	Timeline
3.1	Work in partnership with academics to identify and pursue opportunities to secure national and international funding to support innovation, and strengthen the evidence base for creative arts and health initiatives.	Working group	Ongoing
3.2	Commission research examining the health economics impact of creative arts and health in an Irish context including its contribution to health equity, prevention and value for money.	DCCS and DoH	Q3 2026–Q4 2028
3.3	Establish a common approach to creative arts and health data and evaluation by mapping existing data sources, identifying evidence gaps and potential outcome measures for creative arts and health programming.	Working group	Q3 2026–Q4 2028
3.3	Disseminate and promote findings from TILDA[1] Wave 7 research on cultural engagement and wellbeing among older adults through stakeholder engagement and knowledge-sharing activities that support evidence-informed policy and practice.	DCCS	Q4 2026–Q4 2027
3.4	Collaborate with Healthy Ireland to incorporate measures of creative arts and cultural participation into national population health surveys, strengthening the evidence base for creative arts and health policy and practice.	DoH, DCCS	Q3 2026–Q4 2028



Clinical Creativity Workshop by NCAD / CFA in collaboration with UCD
Photo: Sasko Lazarov, Photocall Ireland.

Strategic Objective 4



Professional Development

Strengthen creative arts and health expertise and support continuous professional development.

Creative arts and health depends on skilled people. Creative practitioners require training and support to work effectively in health and community settings. Healthcare professionals also need a better understanding of how creative arts and health can contribute to person-centred care, wellbeing and service experience. By 2036, the aim is to have clearer professional development pathways and stronger supports for both creative and health-sector partners.

No.	Action	Lead	Timeline
4.1	Identify and map existing arts and health practitioner training resources.	Arts Council	Q3 2026–Q1 2027
4.2	Deliver and evaluate University College Dublin / National College of Art and Design Creative Futures Academy Clinical Creativity arts and health modules for medical practitioners supporting professional development in creative arts and health practice.	DCCS	Q3 2026–Q4 2027
4.3	Scope an approach to the provision of wellbeing supports for creative practitioners.	DCCS, Arts Council	Q3 2026–Q1 2027

Strategic Objective 5

Communications

Increase awareness, understanding and support for creative arts and health.

Clear communication between policymakers, service providers, practitioners and the public is needed to explain what creative arts and health is, why it matters, where it happens, and how people can engage with it. By 2036, the aim is to achieve stronger national awareness of creative arts and health and a higher international profile for Ireland's work in this field.

No.	Action	Lead	Timeline
5.1	Develop a creative arts and health communications plan aligned with the **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036** and this action plan.	Working group	Q1–Q2 2027
5.2	Raise awareness of the benefits and availability of creative arts and health initiatives through coordinated and targeted communication across multiple channels.	Working group	Q2 2027–Q2 2028

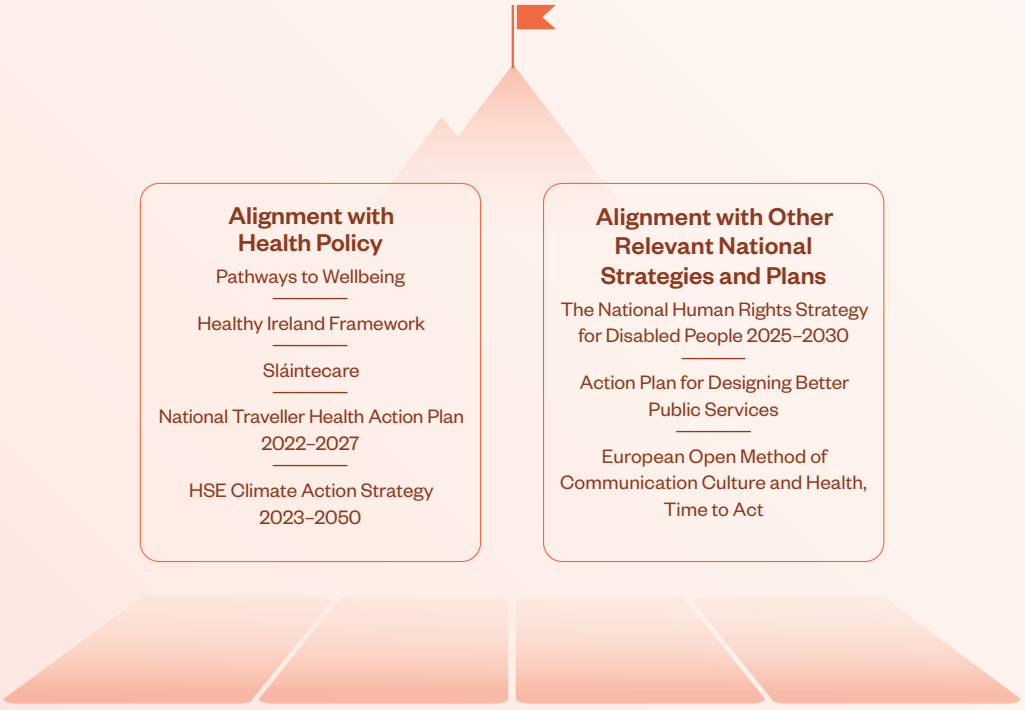


Living Artfully. Carlow and Kilkenny County Councils.
Photo: Michael O'Rourke Photography.

Achievements under the Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health 2025

Achievements to Date

Since 2025, the National Creative Arts and Health Working Group have collaborated to deliver significant progress on the objectives of the 2025 Strategic Action Plan



The **Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health 2025** marked an important milestone in advancing a coordinated national approach to creative arts and health in Ireland. The overarching aim of this action plan was to establish the foundations for a collaborative approach that recognises the contribution of the arts to health and wellbeing outcomes.

Since its publication, the National Creative Arts and Health Working Group has delivered significant progress in strengthening collaboration between Healthy Ireland, the Creative Ireland Programme, the HSE and the Arts Council. Noteworthy advances have been made in embedding creative arts and health within policy and practice, strengthening the provision of arts and health initiatives, supporting professional development and adopting a more coordinated approach to strategic planning. These achievements have laid a strong foundation for the next phase of development and demonstrate the value of a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach to creative arts and health in Ireland.

Examples of key achievements include the following:

Objective 1
Delivery

The second iteration of the **Traveller Wellbeing through Creativity** fund was launched in May 2026[2]. The fund is supporting 10 creative projects that enhance health and wellbeing for Traveller communities in Ireland through arts and cultural expression.

Jointly funded by Creative Ireland and the Department of Health, the Live Music Performances in Residential Healthcare Settings scheme continued to deliver meaningful, measurable impact for older people in 2025, with live performances facilitated in 79 nursing homes by culture and creativity teams in 13 local authorities.

Creative Ireland provided a total of €1 million (including €0.25 million in Shared Island[3] funding) in 2025 for 15 projects under the Creative Health and Wellbeing in the Community scheme. Each project is a partnership between Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland teams in local authorities, working with their local HSE services. An independent evaluation of the scheme was published in 2026[4].

Objective 2
Policy

A national arts and health stakeholder workshop, led jointly by both the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport and Department of Health, brought together policymakers, HSE service delivery leads and patient advocates to inform the development of the **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026–2036** and associated action plans.

The Arts Council facilitated six focus group sessions, engaging artists and creative practitioners to ensure their perspectives and expertise informed the strategic development process.

The National Creative Arts and Health Steering Group was established, strengthening cross-sectoral governance and oversight. The group has guided the implementation of the 2025 Strategic Action Plan for Creative Arts and Health.

The development of the **National Creative Arts and Health Strategy 2026-2036** represents a significant milestone in providing a long-term strategic framework for the integration of creative arts and health across Ireland.

In 2026, to further the working group's effort to sustainably deliver arts and health in older person's care, the Arts Council and Creative Ireland both became members of the Reference Group for the Commission on Care.

The National Creative Arts and Health Working Group contributed direct inputs into the European Open Method of Communication **Culture and Health, Time to Act**[5], helping to shape European policy and practice on the role of culture and the arts in promoting health and wellbeing.

Objective 3
Professional Development

The Clinical Creativity arts and health module for UCD undergraduate medical students, delivered in partnership with the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and the Creative Futures Academy, commenced its pilot phase. The module represents an innovative interdisciplinary approach to supporting healthcare professionals to develop a deeper understanding of the role of creativity, the arts and person-centred approaches in improving health and wellbeing outcomes.

Objective 4
Evidence

The Working Group have supported **The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)** on their Wave 7 work to use population-based data to examine the association between creative engagement and health and wellbeing outcomes across the lifecourse, with a final report due by the end of 2026.

The Arts Council and HSE have collaborated and published the **Arts and Creativity within Social Prescribing**[6] research paper by Dr. Louise Kinlen.

Objective 5
Communications

The HSE and Réalta, with support from the Arts Council, developed a suite of practical guidance resources to support the integration of arts and health within healthcare settings. These include:

- **The Arts in Older Persons Services: A Guide for Working with Artists and Arts Organisations**
- **Transforming Your Care Setting with Art: An Environmental Enhancement Guide for Older Persons Services**
- **Building Creativity into Care: A Guide for Older Persons Services**

The **National Arts & Creative Charter for Older People**[7] developed in collaboration with the National Cultural Institutions aims to increase and enhance the engagement of older people in the arts in Ireland and support the work of arts organisations wishing to engage with older people. Age & Opportunity undertook a development phase that identified opportunities for greater strategic alignment with national cultural institutions.

Endnotes

1 The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) is a large-scale, nationally representative study, the overarching aim of which is to make Ireland the best place in the world to grow old. It is based at Trinity College Dublin. tilda.tcd.ie
2 twtc.ie
3 www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/campaigns/shared-island
4 www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2026/04/Creative-Health-and-Wellbeing-2024-2025-Evaluation.pdf
5 European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Culture and health – Time to act*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025,
6 data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/0432398
artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Social-Prescribing-and-Creativity-Report-April-2026.pdf
7 ageandopportunity.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Arts__Creative_Charter_Poster-Final.pdf

An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

An Roinn Cultúir,
Cumarsáide agus Spóirt
Department of Culture,
Communications and Sport

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme